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Schuylkill River Walk Public Meeting

Story posted on 2005-10-11 22:58:00

- \ WALKING FROM POTTSTOWN TO SCHUYLKILL COUNTY SOON MAY NOT BE AS HARD AS YOU MIGHT THINK.

MEMBERS OF THE SCHUYLKILL RIVER GREENWAY ASSOCIATION GATHERED TO DISCUSS THE POSSIBILITY OF MAKING SUCH A TRAIL A REALITY.

THE GREENWAY ASSOCIATION HAS BEEN A MAJOR PROPONENT OF THUN TRAIL.

THUN TRIAL STRETCHES BETWEEN SCHUYLKILL COUNTY AND PHILADELPHIA. A MAJOR COMPONENT OF THE REVITALIZATION PROJECT IS SMALLER SEGMENTS WITHIN THE TRAIL.

THE MEETING WAS HELD TO HEAR PUBLIC OPINION ON CONNECTING READING TO HAMBURG.

PARTS CONNECTING POTTSTOWN TO READING AND HAMBURG TO SCHUYLKILL COUNTY ARE EXPECTED TO BE COMPLETE IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS.

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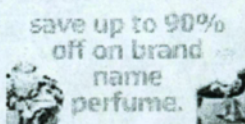
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Trail builders asked to keep natural character of area

Most of the 30 residents at a public meeting about the Schuylkill River and Fr trails say they support the projects.

By Rebecca VanderMeulen

Reading Eagle

Planners working on two proposed recreational trails in Berks County should make sure they maintain the area's natural character, residents said Tuesday night.

Residents gave their comments on the projects at a meeting in the Berks County Agricultural Center in Bern Township.

Most of the 30 people who attended supported the projects.

"I'd love to go out in my backyard and just jump on," said Jay M. Blankenbiller of Centre Township.

One of his concerns was whether there would be adequate restrooms along the trails.

One of the trails would be part of the Schuylkill River Trail, which eventually would run 1: from Pottsville to Philadelphia.

The other is the Freedom Trail, a 65-mile horse, bicycle and jogging trail that would run 1 and around Blue Marsh Lake and Lake Ontelaunee.

Some wondered whether living near the trail would make them vulnerable to crime.

Freedom Trail Association President Percy A. Satoris III said some landowners along the proposed route had similar concerns.

"The typical type thing people would ask is, 'Am I going to have a bunch of people walking in my backyard?'" he said. "Nobody comes on a horse or bicycle to steal your TV."

Those planning the Schuylkill River Trail are in the early stages of plotting its 20-mile path between Reading and Hamburg.

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DEPARTMENTS

Both groups are working together on their projects, and the trails will probably intersect.

"We're still looking at what the best alignment would be," said Philadelphia architect Cha Brenton, who is working on the Schuylkill River Trail.

Residents' opinions are important in deciding where the trails should go, said Philadelphia architect Robert P. Thomas, who is planning the Schuylkill River Trail.

"You could live right off (Route) 61 and think, 'That's a great trail, but my kids would get lost crossing 61 to get to it,'" he said.

Officials plan to ask landowners to grant easements that would allow both trails to be built.

"It's not our intent to come in and steal anyone's property," said Freedom Trail Association member David L. Waibel of Bern Township.

Resident James C. Colflesh of Bern Township pointed out a popular fishing area along the Schuylkill River near Cross Keys Road.

He said he would like that spot integrated into the trail system as a park.

Other residents said they would like the trails to connect to the Reading Blue Mountain and Northern Railroad.

It would also be good to have maps of local businesses available when the trail nears a residential area, residents said.

Wayne S. Gordon of Centre Township said he was concerned about parking along the trail because people have blocked his driveway during the annual Schuylkill River Sojourn.

Thomas said parking lots would probably be located near recreation facilities or popular areas.

Schuylkill River Heritage Area representatives said it's too soon to tell how much the Schuylkill River Trail will cost or when it will be done.

Satoris expects the Freedom Trail to cost \$6 million to build, he has said.

Thomas said another public meeting on the trails is likely this winter.

Contact reporter **Rebecca VanderMeulen** at 610-371-5015 or rvandermeulen@readingeagle.com.

Have an idea?

Anyone with ideas about the features that should be included in the Schuylkill River Trail should contact Madeline A. Cantu, an architect with the Schuylkill River Heritage Area, at 484-9000 or mcantu@schuylkillriver.org.

Tour the trail

The Schuylkill River Heritage Area will conduct a tour of the proposed Schuylkill River Trail between Reading and Hamburg on Sunday from 1 to 3 p.m. The tour will begin and end at the Shoemakersville train station at Main and Canal streets in Shoemakersville.

Freedom Trail

A resource for Berks County and beyond



The Freedom Trail Association was originally started in 1999 under the name of Epler Heritage Trail. In December of 2002, the Freedom Trail Association was formed and the scope of the Epler Heritage Trail was modified to include the development of a horse and carriage and/or wagon trail along the Schuylkill River Greenway.

The Freedom Trail is the vision of a group of Bern Township area citizens who have formed a non-profit corporation known as Freedom Trail, Inc. Their primary mission is to establish a multi-use non-motorized trail system in the Schuylkill River valley that will accommodate horse drawn carriages.

The initial phase of the construction is a trail from the Blue Marsh Lake, Bernville along the Schuylkill River to the Maiden Creek and onto Lake Ontelaunee. The second phase would connect this segment with the Reading Riverplace Development area and subsequently the trail will be expanded up and down the Schuylkill River until completed. Many trail off shoots can also be constructed to create loop trails and staging areas for horse and wagon loading and unloading, including the county fairgrounds that could be accessed via County Welfare Road, as pictured above.

Before there's a trail, there's a trek

Some outdoors enthusiasts spent part of Sunday in Shoemakersville, scouting out a possible path for a portion of the planned Schuylkill River Trail.

By Rebecca VanderMeulen
Reading Eagle

About 10 hikers, canoeists and bicyclists toured part of a proposed recreational trail near Shoemakersville on Sunday afternoon.

The Schuylkill River Heritage Area is working to set up the 136-mile Schuylkill River Trail between Pottsville and Philadelphia.

The group now is working on the Reading-to-Hamburg Development Study to determine the path that a 20-mile section of the trail would take between the two municipalities.

"It's a work in progress," said Madeline A. Cantú, an architect with the Schuylkill River Heritage Area.

Robert P. Thomas, a Philadelphia architect working on the trail, said preliminary maps should be drawn by the spring. It is not known when the trail will be complete or how much it will cost.

Thomas said old canal beds, such as those from the Schuylkill Canal that used to run through Shoemakersville, would be good for the trail because they are wide and flat.

But, pointing out a house in the canal bed, he said the trail could also deviate from the canal's path.

The trail even could follow a borough street, just as the Appalachian Trail runs through Port Clinton, Schuylkill County,

he said. That would give trail users a chance to explore the town or get a meal, he said.

"Coming through towns is one of the things you want to do," Thomas said. "Towns are where you have the concentration of historic buildings."

Thomas pointed out an old service station, a Schuylkill Canal lock house and an old textile mill as examples of such buildings in Shoemakersville.

Resident Amy L. Botwright, who said she has walked every inch of the borough, said the trail would give local people something else to do as well as draw visitors.

"I think we really need some-

thing like this in town," she said. "People don't come to Shoemakersville because they don't think there's anything here."

Thomas also led the group through farmers' fields and woods near the Schuylkill River in Perry Township.

Diane L. Paxson of Upper Tulpehocken Township, a member of the Berks Community Hiking Club, said the Schuylkill River Trail's length would make it enjoyable to hike.

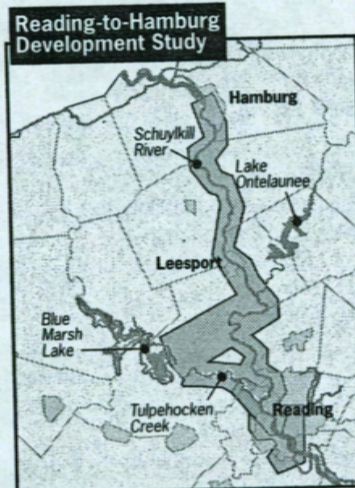
"It'll be nice," Paxson said, "to have something that doesn't just go from here to there."

Contact reporter Rebecca VanderMeulen at 610-371-5015 or rvandermeulen@readingeagle.com.



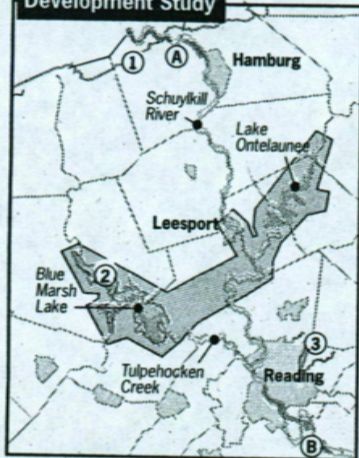
Reading Eagle: Richard J. Patrick

Philadelphia architect Robert P. Thomas, left, leads a group of volunteers past a train station in Shoemakersville on Sunday. The Reading-to-Hamburg portion of the planned Schuylkill River Trail would include both rural stretches and passes through towns, he says.



Reading Eagle

Freedom Trail Development Study



Trail builders asked to keep natural character of area

Most of the 30 people at a public meeting about the Schuylkill River and Freedom trails say they support the projects.

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By Rebecca VanderMeulen

Reading Eagle

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Trails continues on B2

Reading to Hamburg Development Study



- (A) Bartram Trail Section
- (B) Thun Trail Section
- (1) Appalachian National Scenic Trail
- (2) Blue Marsh Trails
- (3) Mount Penn Trails

Reading Eagle

For the good that needs assistance and the wrong that needs resistance

OPINION

Hawley Quier publisher 1940-1976

Myrtle B. Quier, chairman of the board

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Charles M. Gallagher, managing editor

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and her friends in Brooklyn. They unappreciated.

Hitting the trails in Berks

Berks County is fast becoming a haven for hiking enthusiasts. To the vast network of trails that already lace the area, two more are soon to be added.

One of the trails will extend 20 miles along the Schuylkill River between Hamburg and Reading. It's part of the Schuylkill River Trail, which eventually will run all the way to Philadelphia.

The other, to be called the Freedom Trail, will be 65 miles long and meander around and between Blue Marsh Lake and Lake Ontelaunee. In addition to hikers, it will accommodate horseback riders, bicyclists and joggers.

The exact route of the trails

has not been determined and won't be until the concerns of the residents along the proposed paths are taken into consideration.

But, while there are some concerns, such as hikers cutting across private property and the availability of restrooms, many residents welcome the idea.

"I'd love to go out in my backyard and just jump on (a trail)," said Jay M. Blankenbiller of Centre Township.

Hiking trails provide exercise and a chance to commune with nature. And for people and businesses thinking of locating in Berks County, they are part of what makes this area special.

Another view

of paying and maintaining the support staffs for all 50 senators.

The other problem I see lies in the fact that members of the House, who serve two-year terms, spend as much or more time campaigning for re-election as they do attending to the people's business.

My recommendation is to eliminate the Senate and extend the terms of the representatives.

Robert L. Shuman
Womelsdorf

Cost for schools must be shared

Editor:

Apparently Act 72, which calls for using tax revenue from slot machines to fund schools and reduce property taxes, will not benefit anyone for a few years, if ever.

The recent debacle involving a political connection between a company contracted to supply computer control systems for slot machines

the residents of the school district by voter referendum.

I think our state officials fear direct involvement and total funding because they will have to face off with labor unions and school boards with their excessive construction methods.

George Rick Jr.
Reading

Gerlach should vote against drilling

Editor:

In the coming weeks, Congress is expected to vote on a measure to drill for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. In order to preserve the pristine environment of the area, Rep. James W. Gerlach, a Chester County Republican who represents parts of Berks County, should vote against the measure.

The scientific community knows that drilling in the refuge will produce minimal oil and cause major



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EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA Business Journal



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FRONT LINES

By MELINDA RIZZO
Business Journal Correspondent

Horses may draw more tourists to Berks

Berks County wants to be known as horse country and is cantering up to the gate, challenging long-time Chester County as the reigning horse capital of southeastern Pennsylvania.

According to the Penn State Cooperative Extension Service located in State College, horses represent a statewide \$10 billion per year industry and most equine dollars are not settled on a select few.

"In Pennsylvania we have 259,000 horses, and most people in the industry are not making large amounts of mon-

See **Equine** page 29

Berks to pony up on equine industry

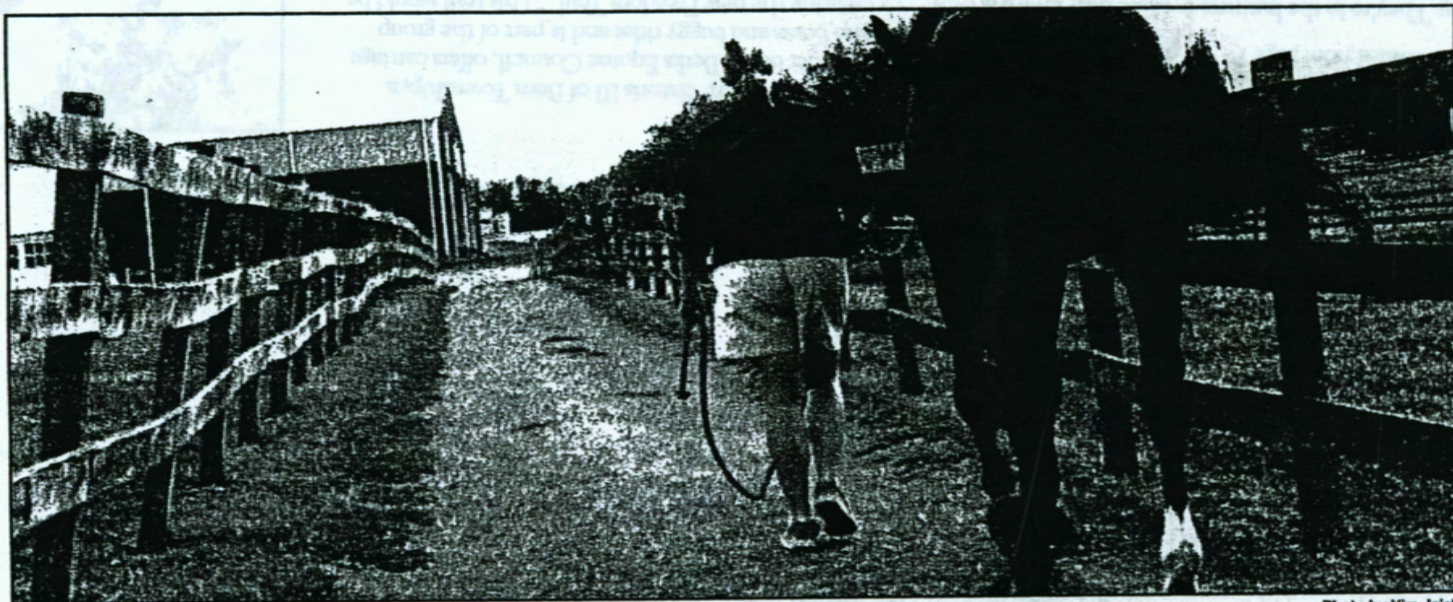


Photo by Kim Jalck

Tracey Krause, barn manager of Passport Farms in Coley, leads a boarder's horse named Legend in from the field. Legend, a 10-year-old Olden-berg dressage horse, is owned by Allen and Carol Oens and has lived at the farm for the past four years.

EQUINE

Continued from page 1

ey. They're in the business because they love the lifestyle and they love horses and open countryside," says Dr. Ann Swinker, an extension service horse specialist and spokeswoman.

There were 212 horse farms in 1996 throughout the Commonwealth, according to the Penn State 1997 Agriculture Census. Swinker says that number has grown.

According to the Berks Equine Council Web site, about 40 percent of the county's 864 square miles are dedicated to farming. Agribusiness is the number one industry in Berks with 1,586 farmers and 1,200 agricultural related job titles for more than 30,000 workers.

While horses are big business in Berks, the equine industry might be the best-kept secret in the region.

In addition to existing horse farming operations, Berks could become the next centerpiece location for thoroughbred racehorses. According to Sarah Reese, president of the Berks Equine Council, the success and allure of Smarty Jones has dispelled the magic of Kentucky as the only worthy thoroughbred producing state in the nation. "Even if they are bred elsewhere — like Kentucky, if a foal lands on Pennsylvania soil, is born here and takes its first wobbly steps here, it's a native Pennsylvanian," Reese says.

It didn't hurt Smarty Jones' reputation that his owners were regular guys and not equine royalty. "Everyone was able to identify with Smarty Jones and his owners, and I think that only added to a

and trap rides.

Percy A. "Buzz" Satoris III of Bern Township, a member of the Berks Equine Council, offers carriage and horse and buggy rides and is part of the group creating the new Freedom Trail. "This trail would be the largest of its kind east of the Mississippi," Satoris says.

The scenic Freedom Trail is routed along the Lake Ontelaunee Trail. Visitors can rent horses or bring their own and enjoy a leisurely clip clop toward Blue Marsh Lake, the trail gently winding and ultimately ending at the Schuylkill River.

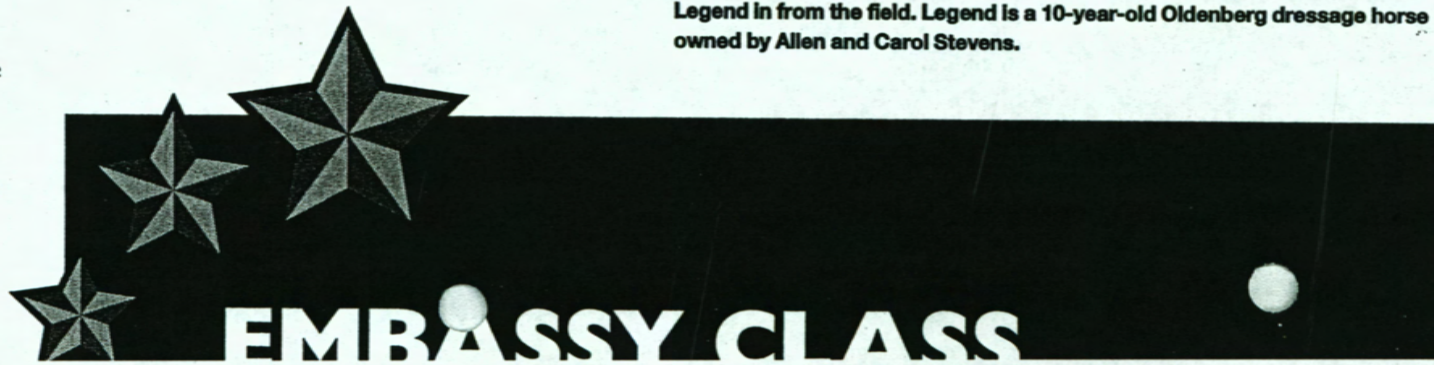
For those looking for down home equine fun and exercise, Charming Creek Farm in Robesonia advertises an open door policy where visitors are welcome. Riding trains are located on the farm's 80 acres and the farm hosts pleasure drives, poker drives, clinics, trail rides and open barn events.

"Charming Creek Farm is a great example of a thriving horse farm," Reese says.



Photo by Kim Jaick

Tracey Krause, barn manager of Passport Farms in Oley, prepares to bring Legend in from the field. Legend is a 10-year-old Oldenberg dressage horse owned by Allen and Carol Stevens.



Reese says yearling Pennsylvania thoroughbreds can command 200 dollars, and have the potential to gain cachet among racing enthusiasts. "Sales for a thoroughbred racehorse here can start at \$1 million," Reese says.

Swinker says goods and services associated with horses including feed, gear, clothing, farmland, housing and transportation, easily swell an area's economic revenue.

"We have two of the largest horse-hauling businesses located here in Berks. We're in a prime position geographically to Newark Liberty International Airport for European horses coming into the country. After they break quarantine, Berks businesses are transporting them across the country and to a variety of racetracks in New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware," Reese says.

The Berks Equine Council, made up of equine Berks County professionals, wants to take the agri-tourism trade into the saddle and grow the notion of conventional horse farming. A byproduct of healthy farming communities keeps the region's rural landscape intact. "For farmers to survive today and to continue to be competitive, they have to think outside of the conventional box," Reese says.

Horse-themed vacations and a Devon Horse Show event in Berks County could attract more tourists to the area, says Reading and Berks County Visitors Bureau President Crystal Seitz. "The Berks Equine Council is coming together to attractively market our area, which has a huge horse population, to those outside Berks," Seitz says.

In addition to land and farm preservation, Seitz says she believes adding horses as a destination for those interested in visiting Berks would also boost the area's agricultural business economy. Seitz says finding ways to stay viable in the farming industry becomes more challenging each year with development pressure and rising equipment costs. Land values, taxation and other issues facing small family-owned farms make farming a risky lifestyle. "What becomes challenging is finding ways to make farms more profitable and diversified," Seitz says.

Providing choices to equine tourist enthusiasts visiting Berks is part of the mission of the Berks Equine Council. Currently under construction is a public trail with entry and exit loops allowing access to more than 65 miles of trails for hiking, biking, horseback riding and horse carriage, buggy